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## HEBREW VERBS WITH A BILITERAL STEM.

THERE are many Hebrew verbs in the forms of which three letters always, or at least very often, recur. It is natural that for these verbs *triliteral* stems have been adopted. There are, however, at least as many verbs in the forms of which only two letters recur. They are the so-called נחי ע' (ו' and י') and the כפולים. The natural and consistent course certainly would be to adopt for these verbs a *biliteral* stem. Almost in all the centuries, in which Hebrew grammar was studied, we find side by side with scholars who held that all stems of verbs consisted of three letters, others who distinguished between triliteral and biliteral stems.

What reasons had the former for deviating from the obviously natural course?

I think they may be found among the following:—

1. Uniformity of all verbal-stems.

It indeed sounds very simple when we can say *all verbs have a stem of three letters*.

2. With the so-called כפולים a *dagesh* is often found in the third stem-letter; a strong indication that a letter has fallen out.

3. With the so-called נחי ע' the ו' and י' sometimes appear as consonants. From this it seems to follow that they formed originally part of the stem.

Are any of these reasons sufficiently sound to justify a deviation from the natural course and a start upon another?

It is the object of the present article to examine this question—

1. When we speak of the stem of a verb, we mean

the collection of letters which frequently occur in the different forms of the verb. Let us, however, not lose sight of the fact that the stem of a verb is only found after all its forms have been collated, and after it has become known which letters constantly recur, for the process of determining the stem is *analytic* and not *synthetic*. The student, therefore, is naturally inclined to combine into one stem the letters which he finds recurring in verbal forms of the same meaning.

Now, which is for him the more simple and easier system? Shall he be told that *every verb has a stem of three letters*, adding the restricting clause: *but in half the number of verbal-forms one stem-letter is almost always known by its absence*:—or shall we not rather say to him *the same stem-letters almost always recur in all verbal forms, but one half of these have two and the other half three stem-letters*? It would seem that guided by the second of these two principles the student would discover more readily the stem of the various verbal forms.

Perhaps it will be objected that, although in the case of the כפולים only two letters reappear, with the נח ע' on the contrary the ו and ך frequently show themselves. But how do they show themselves? Not as letters of influence or of importance, not therefore as consonants but as *vowels*, and, as it is well known, when in Hebrew we speak of *letters*, we mean *consonants*. Of all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet only the ו and ה, the former two frequently, the latter two sometimes, serve as *matres lectionis*, and as such, exercise but little or no influence upon the pronunciation or meaning of the word. We may, therefore, for the present safely leave them out of consideration, taking *letters* in the sense of *consonants*. The ו and ך, however, in the נח ע' do not fulfil the requirements of consonants. How then can the student reasonably consider them as *stem-letters*? Would he, for instance, as to the form יושב, which in the Pentateuch alone occurs seventeen times, or in case of הלוי, which occurs there four times,

have to admit a stem of four letters? No doubt the opponents of biliteral stems will deny this inference, maintaining that in יִשָּׁב and הִלִּיךְ we have an ordinary *cholem* along with a ה'. If this be so, why then should a student be obliged to admit that the ה' has fallen out in forms such as יָבֵא, וַיָּבֵא, and יָבֵא, which in the whole Pentateuch never occur with a ה'? Is this anything else but arbitrary fancy? Can the student in this manner ever obtain a sound notion concerning the formation of stems? It would seem to me that the rule *every verb has a triliteral stem* is not so simple as it was supposed to be.

2. The second argument for the theory that "all verbs have a triliteral stem" is the *dagesh* in the last stem-letter of the כפולים. This argument at first sight would appear conclusive, for, as the Hebrew student will notice in other instances, a letter which falls out is supplemented by a *dagesh* in the subsequent letter. Unfortunately, however, in the present instance the letter supposed to have fallen out is often not supplemented by a *dagesh*, viz. when the last stem-letter stands at the end of a word, e.g. כָּב, וַיִּכָּר, and when it is preceded by a שוא, e.g. וַיִּקְרָא, וַיִּתְּמֵן. It is true that in other cases also the omission of a letter is not indicated by a subsequent *dagesh*, as generally happens with the sibilants or dental letters when they have a שוא and are followed by a guttural, e.g. יִסְעוּ, יִשְׁאוּ, &c. This irregularity, however, as has already been remarked by Juda Chayug, may be explained on euphonic grounds. Can this explanation be applied to other cases? What would prevent us from writing כִּר with *dagesh* in the ר just as in וַיִּתְּרַךְ, or כָּב with *dagesh* in the ב as in וַיִּשְׁכַּב, or קִךְ with *dagesh* in כ as in וַיִּכְרַךְ, in order to indicate that a letter is wanting? What suitable explanation can we give the student for this omission of *dagesh*?

3. The third argument is that in the נחי ע' stems the ה' and ה' sometimes truly appear as consonants. It is but just that we should examine the cases in which this occurs.

It sometimes occurs with nouns derived from נח' ע' stems, e. g. מָוֶה, רִיג, רִישׁ; and in very few instances also with verbs, viz. חָיַב, קָנַם; perhaps also with חָוַר from חוּר (noun), רוּחַ from רוּחַ (noun), and שָׁנַע from שוּעַ (noun).

Our answer to this argument is that the number of these words is too small to form a judgment as to their stem, and there is no objection to consider them as a derivation and expansion of an original biliteral stem, as we do in the case of שָׁאָט, Ezek. xxxvi. 5 from שָׁט, מָעוֹף from מָף, רָחַב (as noun רַחֵב) from רָב, בָּנָא Isa. xviii. 2, 7 from בָּו, אָפַס from פָּס. May we then, for such reasons, consider the existence of forms with ו' or ו' as consonants to be a sufficiently established principle for teaching that whenever ו' and ו' act as נִחְנָחַר they originally were consonants, and that they properly should stand where they are really never found?

The preceding arguments do not, therefore, seem to us sufficient for deviating from what is the natural way by admitting that all verbs have a trilateral stem. If, then, no better grounds are brought forward we shall be bound to reject this theory, the more so as a great many objections may be urged against it.

1. Let us in the first place consider the so-called כפולים, viz. the trilateral stems, in which the second and third stem-letter are the same.

Almost every letter of the alphabet can be the second stem-letter of the כפולים, and therefore can be found wanting. Where in Hebrew grammar, we should like to ask, do we find other instances, besides the כפולים, of the omission, e. g. of כ, ס, or ק? The נ and ת, as is well known, may sometimes, as stem-letters, be found missing. The נ may, moreover, be found wanting where it does not belong to the stem, e. g. in נִפְעַל. The ת falls away in the fem. ending of nouns, so that אִשָּׁה = אִשָּׁתָּה, עֶמְרָה = עֶמְרָתָּה, and in the third pers. fem. of the נח' ל' א'ח, for the usual form וְקָרָא means the same as the rarer form וְקָרְאָה. Where, however, do we find the smallest indication that other letters of the

alphabet are left out? The very few instances of the ל in לָקַח, of the א' in the חִסְרֵי פ' אָחַד, or of the א in אָחַד, scarcely affect our argument. For the ל could have borrowed this characteristic of the נ with which it is sometimes interchanged, as in לִשְׁכָּה = לִשְׁכָּה; with חִסְרֵי פ' א' traces are to be found of other stems with נ as first stem-letter; whilst א is a letter which least of all fulfils the conditions of a consonant. Unanswerable, therefore, our question remains; what instances does grammar furnish that other letters besides ה and נ may drop out?

It may perhaps be objected that with the כפולים two similar letters follow one another of which one may be easily missed because they have the same pronunciation. But does this not occur also with the ל of אֶמְלֵל, or with the נ of שֶׁאֵנִי, where the omission would be all the more easy because three letters of the stem remain? Forms, moreover, such as יִמְצְאֵנִי, יִשְׁחַרְחֵנִי, לִסְבֵּב, חָלַל, הָלַל show that the Hebrew writers were not shy to place two similar letters next to one another. In חֲנִנִי Ps. ix. 14 we even find three similar subsequent letters.

The theory, moreover, of our opponents is not wholly free from inconsistency. Whilst they hold that in the conjugation of the כפולים one of the two similar letters systematically falls out, they intentionally duplicate the last stem-letter in certain forms of the נהי ע'. Can such contradiction escape the attention of the student?

2. When we admit that all verbal forms are made of trilateral stems, of which some lose the second stem-letter, the two remaining letters are not the two last stem-letters, but the first and third stem-letters. Yet it is remarkable that these two remaining letters almost always have the same vowels of the two *last* stem-letters of a trilateral verb, whilst the first of these two never has the vowel of the first stem-letter of a trilateral stem. Would not the more intelligible rule for the student to adopt be that these two stem-letters are the two last, i. e. the two only letters of the stem?

3. Not unfrequently we find with the stems, concerning which the present difference of opinion exists, duplication of two stem-letters. If we adopt biliteral stems, then the two last stem-letters, as also occurs with triliteral stems, i. e. in our theory *all* the stem-letters, are doubled. If, on the contrary, we proceed upon the other theory of a triliteral stem, then we may, in the most favourable cases, consider the two first stem-letters as doubled. This, however, in case of the triliteral stems only occurs with יפה, Ps. xlv. 3, and שנה, Isa. xvii. 11, and as to the former place, according to Ibn Ezra, with a quite exceptional meaning. When, however, the duplication of the two stem-letters must be explained by considering, as in the case of the נחי ע', the first and third stem-letter doubled, the difficulty increases, because this is something unheard of with all triliteral stems.

4. Bearing in mind that letters, therefore also stem-letters, are consonants, the question arises how can triliteral stems be formed of two letters and one *vowel*? In order to avoid this difficulty the נחי ע', as their name shows, have been classified amongst the נחים, and it is explained that the ו' and י' are imperceptibly quiescent. Yet in all other cases נחים are triliteral stems, of which a stem-letter *sometimes* quiesces, *sometimes* acts as consonant. We say קראי, א being a consonant, and קרא, א being נסתר. Can it also be said of the נחי ע' that ו' and י' sometimes appear as consonants? With the other נחים the quiescent letter may even be made a consonant by adding a suffix, e. g. קראני from קרא. Is this conceivable with the נחי ע'?

The נחי ע', therefore, form quite a peculiar class of נחים, and grammarians would have done wisely if, by a different name or by some other means, they had indicated that the נחי ע' greatly differ from the ordinary נחים.

5. It not unfrequently happens with the נחי ע' that the *second* so-called stem-letter does not appear, not even in the form of a vowel. It is true that this occurs now and

then also with the other נחיים, e. g. מִצָּחִי, Num. xi. 11, instead of מִצָּחָהּ; but these instances are very rare, whilst with the נח ע' they are common and occur without any rule. I once heard an examiner—I think it was in reference to Ezek. vi. 9 or xx. 43, where וְנִקְטְמוּ and וְנִקְטְמוּ appear without ו'—who was very conservative on this question, say “that in the נח ע' the ו' or ו' may, according to preference, be written or omitted.” If this be so, what idea shall we form of stem-letters which for no cause and without any indication may be omitted? With equal right it could be said that the second stem-letter is an א which for certain reasons need not appear.

No parallel case of course can be made out of the omission of ו' or ו' in נח ל' and of ו' in נח פ', because with them it occurs according to fixed rules which grammar teaches us. With the נח ע', however, no rule is given, but the ו' and ו' are quite arbitrarily either left out or written.

6. With the solution that the ו' and ו' in the נח ע' may be mentally supplied whenever they are missing (something like נח נִסְתָּר בְּכֹחַ of which certain grammarians make mention) we could reconcile ourselves, if the *first* stem-letter always had a vowel, after which ו' and ו' are used to be נח נִסְתָּר. Frequently, however, the vowel of the first stem-letter is a *Tsere* after which the ו', or a *Kamets* after which both ו' and ו' as נח נִסְתָּר are impossible, because grammar tells us that after these vowels ו' and ו' are never נח נִסְתָּר but always נח נִרְצָה.

We are aware of the view, prevalent in the present century, that the ו' and ו' of the נח ע' originally were consonants, and that e. g. קם is derived from קָמַם, מַת from . . . ? &c. A contraction, therefore, would have to explain the omission of ו' in cases where the ו' *never* appears as a consonant, although such a contraction is not found in those cases where the ו' being a consonant appears as second stem-letter. In 1 Sam. xx. 30, e. g. נִצֵּחַ is not contracted into נִצַּח or נִצַּח; in מִנְעִי, Eccl. i. 15, the ו' remains, although it might so easily have been absorbed by *Kibbutz*. Is not



such teaching liable to cause confusion, especially in the mind of a student?

All confusion, however, may be avoided by adopting the following rule, that ' and ' are stem-letters whenever they act as consonants, and that whenever they do *not* appear as consonants they are not stem-letters but simply נָח נִקְחָר (viz. ' after *Cholem* or *Shuruk*, and ' after *Tsere* or *Chirik*) which sometimes is written, sometimes omitted, as in all other Hebrew words.

Before concluding our inquiry as to the advisability of admitting besides the *triliteral* stems also *biliteral* stems, a few words ought to be added concerning the *dagesh* which often appears in the *second* stem-letter of the so-called כפולים. Supposing that the כפולים have but a biliteral stem, the question arises, what reason was there for placing a *dagesh* in the second stem-letter?

This question furnishes us with the opportunity for treating of the use of the *dagesh* at greater length than the scope of this article at first would seem to require. An exhaustive discussion on the *dagesh* cannot of course be given here. This would require a separate article and a special study. Yet the answer to the question raised requires that we should give at least some of the rules by which the use of the *dagesh* is governed.

This is not the only instance where it is difficult to give a good reason for the placing of the *dagesh*. The distinction of a twofold *dagesh* (*lene* and *forte*) indeed falls very short from being a satisfactory principle of grammar. It seems to lead to a great many difficulties and contradictions, which a teacher whose time is taken up by various other subjects besides Hebrew grammar, cannot have time to answer or explain. The consequence is that perhaps in forty out of a hundred cases the student cannot account for the *dagesh* being placed or omitted. Shall this state of things be allowed to continue?

According to the authority of more ancient grammarians a far greater use is made of the *dagesh* in ancient correct

MSS. than we would expect and than we have in our printed editions; e. g. in the ם of מִצְאָתִי Esther viii. 5; in the ל of יָעֲלֶם Deut. xxviii. 61. We receive from this the impression, as many scholars have observed, that the דגש was frequently placed by the scribes to draw the attention of the reader to one or other point, with the object of securing the right pronunciation of the words. In the ם of מִצְאָתִי, for instance, to prevent this ם from being absorbed by the preceding ם of וָאֵם; in the ל of יָעֲלֶם to fix attention on the נוּ שׁוּא under ע, where a *Chatuf Pathach* might have stood, as in Judges xvi. 3. For the same reason, for instance, we have a דגש in ל of לִי after תַּעֲשֶׂה Exod. xx. 21, 22, that we should not, when reading quickly, pronounce תַּעֲשֶׂל לִי. When, moreover, we take into consideration that a very great part of the MSS. of the Bible came from countries where the pronunciation of the vowels is that of the ספּרדים, we can understand that we frequently find a *dagesh* in letters following a short vowel. In their pronunciation but little difference can be noticed between *Kamets* and *Pathach*, between *Tsere* and *Segol*, between *Cholam* and *Kamets Chatuf*, like with us between *Shuruk* and *Kibbutz*. If, therefore, it happens that the letter following a short vowel is נֶה נִרְאֶה, the shortness of the vowel is sufficiently perceptible; but if this letter itself has a vowel, the *dagesh* indicates that the preceding vowel is short, and ought not to be pronounced as long.

Adding to this function of the *dagesh* that of the *dagesh lene* in the letters בְּנִרְכַּב and that of the *dagesh forte* when a letter is missing, the following rules for the use of *dagesh* could be laid down:—

1. The usual reasons for placing *dagesh* in the letters בְּנִרְכַּב.

2. To place a *dagesh* where a preceding letter has fallen away. This *dagesh* may retain its name of *dagesh forte* because it makes the missing letter assimilate, and hence doubles the pronunciation of the letter having *dagesh*.

3. To place a *dagesh* in a letter following a short vowel, when such a letter itself has a vowel. This *dagesh* we should name *דגש אחר תנועה קטנה*.

With these rules we can go a long way towards explaining the use of *dagesh*. They explain the *dagesh* in almost *all* instances in which *dagesh* occurs in our *common* printed editions. The difficulties, therefore, of the student would on this question be reduced to a minimum. As regards students who have opportunity of consulting correct MSS. they may be told that the *dagesh* fulfils other functions, as the so-called *metheg* or *ga'ya* and the *pesik* serve for more purposes than can be stated in a concise grammar.

Returning to the *dagesh*, which is frequently found in the second *stem*-letter of *biliteral* stems, even after a long vowel, this may be explained by the expediency of drawing attention to *the maintenance of the stem-vowel*. Whilst with the *triliteral* stems the affirmatives *וְ*, *הָ*, and *יְ* generally cause the preceding vowel to be changed into a half-vowel, they cannot exercise this influence with the *biliteral* stems, because with them the preceding vowel is the only *stem-vowel*, of which it would not be advisable to deprive the stem. The *dagesh* having been thus accounted for, no reason remains why with the *כפולים* we should continue to think of *triliteral* stems, and consequently because of the arguments already stated, it would appear more expedient to teach our future students that the verbal stems are divided into *biliteral* and *triliteral* classes.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from the Dutch, by the Rev. Dr. C. van den Biesen.